

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 000661

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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: SPECTRE OF VIOLENCE OVER PLATEAU ELECTIONS

Classified by Ambassador Howard F. Jeter. Reasons 1.5 (B & D).

¶11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Residents in Plateau State are fearful that April 12 and 19 elections will generate violence. Disappointed with incumbent PDP Governor Joshua Dariye, many are looking to the ANPP and AD candidates for a change. The local elite, political power brokers, workers and a disaffected faction of the PDP are all working against a Dariye administration widely viewed as ineffective and incompetent. END SUMMARY.

¶12. (C) With gubernatorial races set for April 19, Plateau residents are worried that a tight race could spark violence. Governor Joshua Dariye is a sub-par politician whose administration of the state's affairs leaves much to be desired. He has been combative, refusing to reach out to many established personalities and traditional rulers. In a state with a pluralistic demography and a strong Muslim minority, he has fueled ethnic/religious animosity by his strident Christianity. Although Dariye is weak, he could still eke by. Dariye has been an Obasanjo cheerleader and although Obasanjo realizes Dariye's shortcomings, the President has begrudgingly decided to support the Governor. PDP National Chairman Audu Ogbeh told the Ambassador recently that Dariye was "on his knees" in his office pleading for his re-nomination. The ANPP and the AD candidates' inability to present a united anti-Dariye front could open the door to his narrow victory.

¶13. (C) The ANPP's Jonah Jang, a retired Air Force officer, is supported by many retired general officers who call Plateau home. Jang, an ethnic Birom, also has the support of ANPP's zonal vice-president and former Abacha right-hand retired General Jeremiah Useni. The AD's Damishi Sango, a former Minister of Sports, narrowly lost the PDP nomination to Dariye in 1999. At that time, he showed party loyalty by encouraging his supporters to back Dariye. But since then, Sango had fallen out with both Obasanjo and Dariye. Finding the grass greener in the AD, Sango feels he can win back what he narrowly lost in 1999. Plateau political broker and former PDP national chairman Solomon Lar dislikes Dariye and is apparently supporting Sango.

¶14. (U) Complaints about the current administration are widespread. State employees have not been paid for months; many resort to hiring out their personal vehicles for commercial activities in order to survive. To make matters worse, Dariye clumsily stated last year that the "payment of salaries is not a priority of my administration." This was not a statement that endeared the Governor to those who vote. Critics claim that no single state or federal project instituted by Dariye has been commissioned during his term of office. With its increased population, the capital city Jos has a water problem that Dariye has been unable to conquer or suggest a plausible solution.

¶15. (C) Dariye's unpopularity is such that he actually may be hurting Obasanjo's prospects in Plateau. During a recent campaign visit, ANPP Presidential Candidate Muhammadu Buhari arrived by road from neighboring Bauchi state and encountered crowds on the way to Jos. Dariye's security operatives intercepted the motorcade at the edge of town and tried to divert the vehicles away from downtown. According to witnesses, the crowd lifted Buhari's Land Rover and carried it over the roadblocks. At this point, the security forces relented and Buhari's entourage was allowed to pass through central Jos, where the streets were lined with thousands of onlookers.

¶16. (C) Allegations of Dariye's efforts to stack the elections in his favor abound. Detractors claim he has allegedly bribed many INEC officials and security agents to ensure his victory on election day. One INEC official was reportedly removed from Plateau state for refusing to cooperate. Opponents claim that Dariye has also vetted the voters lists, removing names of his opponents' supporters. ANPP officials claim that Dariye was behind an effort to

remove other candidates' names from the voters list, rendering them ineligible. While that failed, questions about the voters list remain.

17. (C) COMMENT: In the past, Plateau State had been a model of ethnic and religious diversity, social tolerance and harmony. In the last two years, Plateau and its capital, Jos, have become synonymous with communal violence. Governor Dariye has been ineffectual in arresting this descent and may be a contributing factor to his state's demise. Because of his poor track record, his re-election is far from assured. He may also have saddled President Obasanjo with many of his troubles in Plateau. Support for Buhari signifies that victory in Plateau is not guaranteed for Obasanjo. However, Obasanjo is banking on the Christian majority sticking with him, support from the AD, and the power of incumbency to prevail.

JETER